

Dr. David Howard, Joshua-Ruth, Session 4, Joshua 1:1-9

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This is Dr. David Howard in his teaching on Joshua through Ruth. This is session number four, Joshua chapter one, verses one through nine.

Okay. In this coming segment, we're going to begin actually looking at the book of Joshua and I want to refer you to an accompanying document that will be available for you, which is my outline of the book. And if you see that, it might help you to pull it out while we're discussing this. But if you look at my outline, you'll see that I see the book in four major sections, chapters one to five, six to 12, 13 to 21, and 22 to 24.

And in my labels for those, those four sections, I've included the word inheritance or inheriting in every point. So, this goes back to the theme of the book that I've mentioned in another segment where I think this is all part of the inheritance. I'll just say a parenthetical word here that I'm, I published early on a textbook on the Old Testament historical books.

I had a chapter on Joshua and in that chapter, I had an outline of the book. At that point, my outline was a three-point outline in the first section entitled something to the effect of the conquest of the land. And then a few years later, I was asked to do this commentary.

As I dug more deeply into the book, I realized that the idea of conquest is maybe a little bit misleading, as I've mentioned in earlier segments. And that I think it's more God's giving of the land and the inheritance and so on. And then really the conquest doesn't start till chapter six.

So, I see the first five chapters as preparations for this. And so, in my commentary, I had the four sections that I've just mentioned. And so, I'm in print contradicting myself in the way I see the book of Joshua.

But it's the later version that I'm going with at this point. And I think I've intentionally tried to avoid the word conquest in the major titles just to kind of again emphasize what I see as a more important theme issue in the book. So, let's talk about the first section, which I would see as chapters one to five.

And I would call that the preparations for inheriting the land. And Israel is about to come into this great enterprise. It enters the land of Canaan and had been promised for centuries.

The Pentateuch points to it repeatedly. And now the time is finally here for the people are to enter the land. It's the second generation.

The children who were not born when they came out of Egypt or who were underage at that point. So, it's a new day. And the first preparation was the preparation of the leader himself, Joshua.

And in chapter one, we have God's charge to Joshua, telling him to be strong, courageous, and so on. And then we have the preparation of the tribes and the instructions to get ready to go for the crossing of the Jordan River. The story of Rahab in chapter two shows us that the Canaanites were ripe for the taking.

She and the others had heard about the Israelites and they were afraid. It also, Rahab herself, the character, the woman, is a shining example of a true believer. Essentially a Canaanite convert and God's grace in her life.

Chapters three and four are the crossing of the Jordan River. Chapter three, looks ahead to the actual crossing. And there are two things there.

The emphasis on God's presence with the ark. And then the actual miracle of the standing up of the waters and stopping of the waters. That's such a big event that all of chapter four is devoted to looking back at that, to building the memorial stones and highlighting that.

And then chapter five, I would see, is the chapter devoted to holiness. Getting right with God before they actually engage in the first. In the first battle.

So that's kind of an overview there. And with that said, we want to begin now actually looking at chapter one. So, if you have your Bibles, please open to chapter one.

And the first part of the chapter is, of course, God's charge to Joshua in verses one to nine. So, let's focus on those for now. And we've looked at the introduction to this section with verse one.

Sets the stage. It's a narrative, in a sense, a narrative framework here. This whole chapter here is built around dialogue or speeches.

God's speeches to Joshua, Joshua's instructions to the people, the people's response, and so on. So, chapter one, verse one, after the death of Moses, servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua, son of Nun, Moses' assistant. And we've seen earlier that this kind of highlights Moses' position as a successor, but not quite the worthy successor yet.

He's only the aid or the assistant to Moses. And then God comes to say, verses two and following, Moses, my servant, is dead. Therefore, arise, go up to Jordan.

You and all those people in the land that I am giving to them. I'm reading the English Standard Version, the land that I am giving. Some other versions read the land that I am about to give to them.

If you know Hebrew, this is a participial form of the verb to give. And so it means the land that it's not yet completed. I'm in the process.

That's an interesting point because in the next verse, it gives us a different form of the verb. Verse three, it says, every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon, I have given to you. And the verb there is, if you know Hebrew, it's in the perfect, it's the past, completed action.

NIV, unfortunately, and maybe other versions as well, unfortunately, reads in verse three, the Lord, I, the land I am about to give or I'm giving, I forget exactly. But it's it does not follow the change in the verb form in NIV the way that the Hebrew has it. And I think the Hebrew is trying to tell us that no matter how you look at it, God is giving the land.

And one from one level, obviously, he's in the process of giving it. They're not even in the land yet. They're east of the Jordan.

They're not have not crossed into the West yet. They're not there. They haven't taken it.

So, God is in process or God is about to give them. That's how you translate the participle. But from another perspective, the land is already theirs.

It's they have legal title to it. It's as if it's a done deal. As matter of fact, you could say it was theirs since the time of Abraham.

God has said this is your land. And so, all you have to do now is go receive it. But it's already yours.

So, I've already given you the land. And so no matter how you look at it from the perspective that it's an in-process thing or it's a done deal, that's one of the reasons why I think you see the giving the gift of the land as an important theme in the book. The word Natan, which is the word to give, occurs dozens and dozens of times in the book, always in the context of God giving Israel the land.

And that's highlighted right here in the first couple of verses of God's charge to Joshua. Continuing, verse four says, from the wilderness in this Lebanon, as far as the

Great River, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites to the Great Sea, toward the going down to the sun shall be your territory. I've looked at the map we had earlier.

The land is all of the land of what today is Israel and up into Syria toward the Great River, the Euphrates River, down to other parts of in the Pentateuch. It tells us down to the River of Egypt, down to the border of Egypt. And all of that's the sort of the map, the geographical map that Joshua, God is painting for Joshua.

This is the land that they are to have. Now, it mentions the River Euphrates, and that's a long way to the northeast. And we don't have any record of Israel actually physically residing in the land all the way that far.

That's through the land of Aram, through Syria. And in Solomon's day, Israel's influence extended that far for sure. And that would be probably the way we can understand that.

Then in verse five, it says, no man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life, just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you, forsake you. So there's a reference here to the Canaanites not being able to withstand them.

And then secondly, God's promise of his own presence. Just as I was with Moses, I will be with you. I will not leave you, forsake you.

This idea, the reference to I will be with you, is again a reference to the relationship between God and his people, in this case, the leader. But then by extension with the people that he is leading. That goes back all the way to, again, God's promises to Abraham.

God says I will be your God, you will be my people, I will be with you, and so on. So that is a phrase. wording or promise that we find repeatedly throughout the entire Old Testament. To Moses, to people like Isaiah, Jeremiah, David, and so on.

Verses six to nine are maybe the second part of God's speech to Joshua. And the thing that dominates here is the command to be strong and courageous. We have that in verses six and seven and verse nine.

And interestingly, we see that there's kind of a bracketing here. Verses six to nine, it says be strong and courageous. And verse seven, says be strong and very courageous.

And that, in a sense, kind of highlights what is stated now in verses seven and eight. So, let's look at that. Verse six, beginning, says be strong and courageous because

you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to your fathers to give them.

So, there's this idea of the inheritance, again, and fulfillment of promises. And then verse nine says something similar. Have I not commanded you to be strong and courageous? Don't be afraid, don't be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.

So that, you can think of that in terms of the sort of the military context, obviously. This is a great challenge for Israel and Joshua. And so there needs to be a measure of physical courage in going into these battles.

But I think it's interesting that in this entire charge of Joshua, God doesn't really give him any military advice. He doesn't say, go here and train the people for six months and make sure you develop this fighting force. Here's the military strategy, here's the places to go.

The heart of this exhortation here with all these strong, be strong and courageous words is in verses seven and eight. And verses seven and eight don't mention the military issues at all. So, let's look at verse seven.

Only be strong and very courageous. And in some ways, we might argue that this means be strong and very steadfast, pursuing without wavering the task that I'm giving you here. And the task in these verses is not the military.

Rather, what is it? Only be strong and very courageous. Verse seven, be careful to do according to all the law that Moses, my servant, commanded you. So interesting that Joshua's courage or steadfastness, at least here, is tied to obedience to the law, not confronting the Canaanites.

The obvious point is that if he's obedient to the law that had been given earlier, that God is going to give him success in the military endeavors that he encounters. Continuing to verse seven, do not turn from the right or the left so that you may have good success wherever you go. And then continuing the kind of hammering of the same point, verse eight, this book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it.

For then you will make your way prosperous. Then you will have good success. So, you can almost imagine, psychologically, Joshua being poised and ready to go and thinking, here's all the Canaanites we got to defeat.

And kind of wondering, well, when's God going to get to the military advice and strategies here? And he doesn't do it at all. It's all be faithful to what I've

commanded you and I will take care of the rest. In some ways, this account here and then all of chapters one to five remind me of Jesus' words where he said, seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these other things will be added to you.

So, if Joshua is doing what he should be doing, and if the people are preparing their way, and in chapter five, they celebrate the Passover, they are circumcised, and they get ready for the task. If they are right with God, then God's going to give the credit and the victories. That's more important than worrying about the nitty gritty of the military strategy.

We will talk in a separate segment about how this fits in with a larger theme of godly leadership that goes back to the key to success for the kings that God had. So, we'll come back to this at another point. I want to take some time and talk about the issue in these verses about prospering and having good success.

Chapter one, verse seven, at the end says, do not depart from the right or the left so that you may have good success wherever you go, and then in verse eight it says, then you will make your way prosperous and you will have good success. There are some groups of Christians that have taken verses like this here and elsewhere, Psalm one for example, the righteous are like a tree planted by streams of water and everything he does will prosper in other places. And they've taken these verses, I would say, out of context and run with them in terms of interpreting that a true follower of the Lord will have material success and should essentially strive toward material wealth and riches.

And if you're not succeeding financially, you're not in God's will. And if you're watching this, you may be familiar not only here but in other parts of the world I've discovered as well that there's this kind of preaching. Television and radio ministries and others are built around this kind of thing.

And I would say it's a distortion of the biblical teaching. There are many other passages that point in different directions. And number one, number two, it really represents a misunderstanding of the words here in this chapter.

So let me say a couple of things about that. I want to begin by reminding you of some other parts of scripture that show us a different side of things. So, for example, in Proverbs 23, you can turn to it on your own, but Proverbs 23 verses four and five say this, do not wear yourself out to get rich.

Have the wisdom to show restraint. Cast but a glance at riches. And they are gone because they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky.

Riches are ephemeral. And you remember the parable of Jesus about the rich man who built the barns to house all his wealth and then he dies and is not able to take it with him. One of my favorite verses in scripture, passages in scriptures in Proverbs three, verses seven to nine, says this: "Two things I ask of you, Lord, do not refuse me before I die." Number one, "keep falsehood and lies far from me." And number two, "give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread."

What a prayer. Give me neither poverty nor riches. It goes on to say the reason for that, "otherwise I may have too much and disown you and say, who is the Lord?" If I have too much riches, I'll feel self-contained and self-satisfied.

Years ago, I was teaching at Trinity Divinity School in the Chicago area and Trinity is located in the northern suburbs in a very rich area. And I was teaching a Sunday school class in one of the very exclusive suburbs. And I discovered that pretty much everyone in that church did not live in that suburb.

They commuted in from quite other areas. And they told us that the reason was that everybody in that suburb was so rich that they felt they had no need of religion or God at all. They were self-made millionaires, billionaires. And that was a sad thing to see.

So, Proverbs 30 verse 9 says, "Otherwise, I may have too much, disown you and say, where is the Lord? Or on the other hand, I may become poor and steal and so dishonor the name of my God." So, the prayer in Proverbs is to have a middle way, not to aspire to riches, certainly not to be tempted to steal when they're too poor.

So that's a wonderfully balanced prayer, I would say. Secondly, the words here in Joshua, to prosper and have good success, occur dozens of times in the Old Testament. And they occur together 50-some times.

I did a study in the process of writing the commentary and found that in no case do these words refer to financial prosperity. It refers to success or prospering in one's endeavors almost always because of God's grace and presence. Success in relationship with neighbors, success in relationship with God.

Abraham's servant, for example, in Genesis 24 is given success by God in his mission to find a wife. He's not looking for money, he's just trying to find something. Joseph succeeded in Potiphar's household because God was with him, the same word was used there.

Jeremiah speaks quite a few times about the wicked not prospering. And he's not referring to finances, but the not prospering or succeeding in their evil intents. So their intent was to do evil, but they did not succeed in that.

So really these words are not referring to material prosperity at all anyway. And so those who would build what sometimes is called a prosperity gospel or health and wealth gospel, I think are building it on false foundations. Misunderstanding, if not a deliberate distortion of the meaning of these words themselves and also the teaching of other parts of Scripture.

So, God's charge to Joshua is an important way to begin the book and it sets the stage for things to come. The rest of the chapter has Joshua interacting with the tribes.